Whiteness as a Barrier to Becoming a Culturally Relevant Teacher: Clinical Experiences and the Role of Supervision

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Abstract

Clinical experiences are crucial to the development of prospective teachers (PTs), especially the student teaching practicum. While the dynamics of schools are beginning to change in response to documented inequities for students, particularly students of color, the student teaching practicum remains largely unchanged and unchallenged with regard to addressing racism, oppression and white dominance. In this study, we explore PTs' experiences and discourse in the context of student teaching in urban schools and the corresponding supervision of student teachers. Specifically, we examine the ways in which whiteness and racism obstruct the development of culturally relevant teachers. The data illuminate key insights into the ways in which PTs maneuver to avoid critical self-interrogation in relation to racism and inequities in schools. We conclude that clinical supervision experiences are opportunities to hide behind and/or challenge whiteness, and that the role of the supervisor is critical in facilitating the exposure to, and enactment of, culturally relevant pedagogy.

Keywords

Culturally relevant pedagogy, whiteness, clinical experiences, supervision

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Introduction

While clinical experiences have been scrutinized at some level (AACTE, 2010; Grossman, 2010; Zeichner, 2010), not much has changed over the decades in most teacher education programs (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012). The reality of the limited effectiveness of clinical experiences, the absence of a *functional* culturally relevant teaching focus (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2014), and the continued resistance to change regarding innovative student teaching practica (Zeichner, 2002; Allen, Perl, Goodson & Sprouse, 2014), propelled us to examine more closely the expectations, mythology, and practices surrounding these experiences. Teacher education as an institution, while necessarily defending itself against a barrage of scrutiny, needs to acknowledge and thoughtfully confront its shortcomings in producing dynamic, culturally relevant teachers prepared to transcend the status quo, particularly given the sociopolitical realities in the U.S. today (e.g., prevalent racism, increased number of anti-Semitic acts, xenophobia). One such area of vulnerability is our field's collective utilization of clinical experiences, particularly the sacrosanct student teaching experience.

The divide between theory and practice is evident in education and it is often even more pronounced in urban classrooms (Aronson, 2016; Grossman, Hammerness & McDonald, 2009). Urban education prospective teachers (PTs), often introduced to many theories on teaching and learning (e.g., constructivism, inquiry-based teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, etc.), struggle to see practical use of these theories in real world teaching. With regard to culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) we use Ladson-Billings (1995) as a framework for the focus of our urban education program, where PTs continually ask, 'But, how do I do it?' (Ladson-Billings, 2006). CRP, while seemingly straightforward, is a complex combination of beliefs and pedagogical skills (Young, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2014). While nodding their heads in legitimate agreement about the need for equity in schools, we find our PTs often at odds with what that means in the real world of teaching and what they need to 'do' in order to make CRP a reality (Willey & Magee, 2015). When pushed to consider why schools are inequitable spaces, it is not uncommon to see and hear PTs use deflection strategies to avoid conversations about both racism and complexities in teaching (Marx, 2006). Longitudinally reflecting on these observations in conjunction with the research literature and our own histories as clinical experience supervisors, the following questions were generated:

- How can we better understand what stands in the way of our PTs' development as equity-minded and critically-conscious teachers?
- What can we do to promote growth as a culturally relevant teacher?
- How do clinical experiences support and/or hinder these goals?

Thus, these questions helped drive our inquiry and reflection on how to best provide supervision to PTs in order to become more culturally relevant teachers.

Theoretical Framework

As a way to explain the resistance towards CRP, we use the theoretical framework of critical whiteness studies (CWS). In this article, we first share our ideas about whiteness as an obstruction to moving theory into practice. We posit that if PTs do not actively believe,

understand, and use whiteness and in/equity lenses to analyze their own teaching – and to contextualize and historicize their beliefs – they will struggle as culturally relevant teachers. Second, we draw on six years of experience studying the development of PTs in school-based cohorts of a preparation program focused on CRP and anti-racist teaching, as well as two years working intensely with, and studying the development of, mentor teachers tasked with supporting PTs during student teaching. We will share what we have learned about both the structural and pedagogical changes that support the development of culturally relevant teachers, and we will explicitly identify the moves that PTs make to avoid conversations around race and inequity. We finish with a discussion of how we respond to these challenges with activities, discussions, and a new appreciation for what is possible in a two-year undergraduate program.

Supervision for Equitable and Anti-racist Schools

In this article, we broaden the notion of supervision to include all supervisory activities designed to prepared PTs to understand and skillfully implement CRP (Zeichner, 2010). Being supervisors is at the heart of each of our professional identities, and, in this capacity, we make decisions about which learning activities PTs participate in in order to develop an understanding of children, families, and communities. This expansive view of supervision accounts for the range of perspective needed in order to understand and commit to becoming a culturally relevant teacher, one who inherently, and as default, sees the benefits and strengths that traditionally marginalized children and families bring to education (González, Moll & Amanti, 2006). From a teaching perspective, this also involves broadening what counts as academic achievement, where learning is measured by more robust means than weekly pre- and post-benchmark tests, and where the teacher also assumes responsibility for their own and their children's cultural competence and social consciousness.

We see teacher education programs as spaces where these skills are thoughtfully and explicitly developed. We begin by recognizing that defensiveness and blaming (students, families, or administrators) are strategies routinely invoked to make uncomfortable feelings manageable. With this in mind, teacher educators need to be skilled themselves at engaging and supporting pre-service teachers in learning anti-racist and culturally competent methods. Teacher education programs that claim to be focused on equity, social justice and/or anti-racism can commit to including more than "multicultural" education in their programs, where teachers move beyond "windows and mirrors" (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016) to being racially and critically conscious (Ladson-Billings, 2006; 2014; Michael, 2014). Anti-racist teachers understand that no content area is safe from whiteness and racism and that everything touching schools and the children in them are threatened. We recognize that teacher educators are often implicated in perpetuating racist schooling structures and practices given their unpreparedness to engage PTs in conversations highlighting and unpacking manifestations of whiteness. Using CWS allows us to better understand why and how pre-service teachers internalize and enact or resist the practice of culturally relevant teaching and how intentionally connecting to clinical field experiences is necessary.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) has been interpreted in many different ways (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Here we discuss our conceptualization of CRP and describe how we use it as a guiding framework for our teacher preparation program, including our supervision work. We consider the three tenets described by Ladson-Billings as the theoretical nucleus of CRP. These are: (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160). We use multiple texts by Ladson-Billings, written over a substantial period of time, to develop a complex and practice oriented operational definition of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Academic success, extending beyond getting good grades, challenges teachers to do what is necessary for students to succeed such that students *experience* academic success. While on the surface this sounds like an educational platitude, we internalize this tenet as a commandment for teachers to continually challenge *themselves* to find ways for students to be successful. Beyond curricular choices, teachers scrutinize their own dispositions and expectations and consciously look for ways that students are excluded from learning. For example, while a thoughtful and diverse choice of texts is a valued practice, if teachers routinely dishonor children through punitive disciplinary practices, academic success will remain elusive. Cultural competence calls teachers to publicly honor students' culture in meaningful and authentic ways. For example, families are invited to share their expertise in class and are positioned as invaluable resources to the school. Critical consciousness pushes teachers to use school as a vehicle for social change. By asking questions such as "whose voice is being heard?" and "which groups benefit?" students are encouraged to challenge dominant historical narratives and work to change the status quo. CRP is a complex theoretical framework that can guide a teacher's practice. Supporting PTs to not only understand the sophistication of the framework, but also to develop the skills that demonstrate it, is a daunting task that requires commitment, practice, and time (Milner, 2003).

Critical Whiteness Studies and the Formation of White Identity

According to the US Department of Education (2016) the country's educator workforce is overwhelmingly white. While more diverse than in previous years, in the 2012 school year 82% of the educator workforce was white, and only 51% of the students were white. Given this discrepancy and the continued inequities present in American schools (Anyon, 2014; Lipman, 2013), preparing teachers to be racially and critically conscious is a must.

Given the racial disconnect in schools and the historic marginalization of particular racial groups, asking how race factors into school practices is critical. Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) call into question and make visible the systemic practices that benefit whites and oppress others (DiAngelo, 2011; Michael, 2014). CWS, like critical race theory, is based on the premise that racism exists and will *always* be the default action unless otherwise identified (Milner, 2003). CWS positions racism and whiteness as more than personal actions or affiliations, and offers a space for an anti-racist white ideology (Tatum, 2001). As Michael (2014) explains, "For White people who do not consciously identify with the ideology of White supremacy, there have traditionally been only two other ways to be White: One could either be ignorant of one's

Whiteness or one could feel guilt and shame about it. Given these three options – supremacist, ignorant, or guilty – any healthy conscious identification with one's White identity seems impossible" (pp. 3-4). Working with our PTs to see whiteness as a racist system that has influenced them from birth and before is more challenging than the celebration of diversity that is routinely seen in teacher education programs.

Schools, like other social spaces, are not immune from the influence and impact of whiteness. In fact, they have been steeped in it with whites benefitting from the existing system (DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenburg, 1993). The traditional school curriculum normalizing whiteness, racist school discipline policies, and inequitable access to academic opportunities can be understood when a CWS lens is applied. Teaching PTs about structural racism, whiteness and anti-racist teaching is critical to developing equity-minded teachers who can leverage a critical racial consciousness to support more equitable schools.

While it is one thing to label white privilege, it is another thing to address this in practice, and as such we recognize the enormity of this task. Our white PTs, for the most part, have walked through life without addressing their whiteness. Even progressive PTs, who claim to be social justice advocates, have rarely spent time interrogating how race plays a role in their own lives. We see this not as a way to place blame or guilt on PTs, but rather as an opening to explore whiteness and white racism. PTs, products of a racist school system themselves, have been socialized since birth to see whiteness as good (Picower, 2009). Because they are often ignorant of historical and systemic practices, including content about whiteness, white supremacy, and structural racism into a teacher preparation program becomes critical. Given this history and the uncomfortable disequilibrium that whites experience when asked to engage in dialogue about race (DiAngelo, 2018), we do not expect PTs to function at the highest level of racial literacy. However, teaching PTs to see white racism at play in their own lives, histories, and experiences is a necessary beginning.

As discussed above, many white PTs come with little to no awareness of a racialized world (Marx, 2006) or an understanding of how students of color are continually exposed to racial microaggressions and stereotype threats (Steele, 2003). Both of these contribute to inequitable learning spaces for children (McIntosh, 2004; Tatum, 2001), and, when asked to consider them, PTs often react defensively. Defensive reactions are expected, as many whites, including PTs, have yet to develop the necessary skills or capacity for open, critical conversations about race (DiAngelo, 2018; Frankenburg, 1993).

Context and Background

As critical, white teacher educators, we work to prepare culturally relevant elementary school teachers by centering our course work and field work around culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), anti-racist pedagogy (Marx, 2006), and critical pedagogy (Emdin, 2016). PTs in our program are organized as a cohort of approximately 25 peers and remain together as a unit for four semesters. As part of an ongoing, critical redesign of our teacher education program, we piloted a model of teacher education where faculty 1) anchored themselves with a PT cohort at a local partnership school for coursework and clinical experiences, 2) "looped" with PTs for four consecutive semesters, and 3) assumed the role of

'faculty coach' during the final two semesters of student teaching. This redesign allowed us to teach various courses across the two years of our undergraduate program, including student teaching supervision, and to extend and fundamentally change the ways in which we, as professors, interacted with and understood our PTs.

Teaching various sequential courses allowed us to integrate critical curriculum in obvious places such as multicultural education courses, but also in less obvious spaces, such as mathematics and science methods courses, student teaching supervision, and reflection upon community-school events. Additionally, working with PTs for consecutive semesters allowed us to build on challenging ideas about race and equity and to specifically connect them to both field experiences and student teaching. For example, we often referred back with specificity to course readings, community school events and other experiences that helped to re/center race and equity in discussions with PTs. In addition, as our ethical responsibility, we have critically critiqued our in/adequacies as teacher educators (Willey & Magee, 2015) and, in response, have made specific changes to our courses and program. For example, while we feel the urgency and responsibility to prepare critically conscious and culturally relevant teachers as quickly as we can, we better understand now, and are humbled by, the time is takes PTs to develop the capacity to engage in critical dialogue around racism and inequities in schools. Specifically, as tempting as it is to equate particular PT classroom responses with a developing critical consciousness, we clearly see how shifts towards consciousness are initially fragile and often reverberate between 'getting it' and 'not getting it.' Our experiences with integrated coursework and practica reveal the complexity in this development, especially as it intersects with school-based realities and mentor teachers, as well as their respective development towards culturally relevant pedagogy. While we wish that the complexity of understanding systems of oppression and schooling could be rushed through or disregarded, we realize that it simply cannot.

The elementary education faculty make programmatic decisions in the context of simultaneously preparing mostly white (about 85%) teachers and providing intentional supports for PTs of color. We are clear that both deserve concerted, albeit different, attention. At a more macro level, however, our goal of supporting the development of culturally relevant teachers is consistent. To do this, we create spaces in the program where conversations grounded in the clinical experiences can occur – seminars, inter-block discussions with instructors, and cross-curricular projects that focus on equity and race. We build and scaffold field-based curricula that focus on whiteness, equity, and social justice. 'Looping' with our students allows us to intentionally re-read key articles, apply equity lenses to current events, and layer on CWS readings in both traditional coursework and practica. To our point above, we have found that the development of a racial consciousness and culturally relevant pedagogy among PTs requires a sustained and multimodal approach. There is no one "right" way and the choices that we have made as instructors are inextricably tied to our own racial development and identities.

Method

This study design draws on sociocultural theories of learning and development, and employs qualitative research methods to understand the processes of understanding and enacting CRP by PTs. Given the focus on learning *in situ*, qualitative methods are most appropriate when researchers are studying the context of learning and instruction, particularly as it pertains to the

dynamism of identity and culture of a particular group (PTs) over time (Erickson, 2006). Understanding group and individual identity and culture – their ways of being in the world – requires intense field work that includes participant observations, continual journaling and reflection on teaching and learning sessions, and document analysis. Documents included PTs' written assignments, including responses to discussion prompts, lesson and unit plans, documentation of student learning, and analysis of student work.

Data was collected over the course of six years, which included four, separate cohorts of 24-28 PTs. For the purposes of this article, we are primarily concerned with the data from the latter two semesters of the teacher education program, which are the two, eight-week student teaching experiences. The most salient data emerged from the seminars, the assignments associated with the student teaching experiences, and the communication between supervisor and PT following formal and informal observations. In addition to direct quotations from PTs, data is presented below in the form of vignettes, which are derived from our fieldnotes.

The findings from this study were synthesized from our recurring work with PTs. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted utilizing the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers applied codes representing the sentiment of each paragraph or data cluster and/or developed codes identifying patterns within the data themes (Creswell, 2002; Hill et al., 2005). Analysis followed three iterations of analysis: first iteration – initial codes/surface content analysis; second iteration – pattern variables; and third iteration – application to data set (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). As a result, we better understand the need for a systemic, systematic, and longitudinal approach to integrating critical practices in an urban teacher education program. The sections below outline the synthesized findings, and the substantial changes made to our courses and ways of interacting with PTs. These changes include more direct attention to, and discussion about, how PTs conceptualize and engage in teaching and pay attention to racialized issues and biases.

Findings

Our longitudinal examination of the development of culturally relevant teachers has produced key insights into the ways in which PTs maneuver to avoid critical self-interrogation in relation to racism and inequities in schools. These insights are used to suggest changes to our program with regard to field work, readings, and assignments. Some of those changes are discussed below, and some are included in the next section. Throughout the discussion of the findings, we highlight structural and pedagogical features (i.e., partnership school contexts; instructional activities; clinical experiences; community-school events) that influence, to various degrees, PTs' conceptualization and enactment of CRP. When appropriate we include the ways in which clinical experiences both reify whiteness and serve as opportunities to challenge whiteness.

Prospective Teachers Avoid Interrogating Complicity in Racist Systems

Analysis of the data revealed multiple ways that PTs avoid responsibility for acting in equity-minded ways. In particular we noticed two main approaches: 1) deficit-oriented preoccupation with student behavior and 2) abdication of responsibility. These two main avoidance strategies

appeared multiple times in transcripts of the PTs' student teaching seminars and in debriefing sessions with PTs. Below we describe each strategy in detail.

Deficit-oriented preoccupation with student behavior

For the deficit focused approach, PTs singularly focus on student behavior, or the potential for student misbehavior. When the behavior actually occurs, the PTs have difficulty considering that the behavior is appropriate or that it has legitimate causes. During student teaching supervision, first hand classroom observations by the PTs' instructors (the authors) are important because we are able to see for ourselves what is happening and offer an alternative narrative. Some degree of concern with student behavior is completely appropriate and expected. PTs do need to deal with real outbursts and actions by students. What is concerning about these occurrences is the over reliance on student mis/behavior, perceived or actual, and the lack of a racial consciousness in interrogating the episodes.

Cassie's story is a helpful example of how we see this in action. Cassie[1] is a white, first semester senior who also works as a running coach at her local middle school. Her coaching supplies a nice opportunity to work with children and Cassie is more confident than most PTs when it comes to interacting with students. Like many PTs, Cassie began her teacher preparation with little conscious awareness of race and whiteness. Also like many PTs, she openly supports equitable schools but struggles to see larger oppressive systemic issues. For the following vignette, Cassie is completing her first student teaching experience in a second grade classroom. The observed 30-minute lesson focused on reading and writing folk tales. Below is a sample of the written feedback Cassie received from one of us:

> The one [folk tale] that you re-read – you said you loved it but you didn't say why. Use it as an exemplar and let the students know what you thought was strong about the story. *You can also move around the room. The kids were really engaged but moving around is always a good idea to remember. Don't stay planted up front* [italics added for emphasis]. You did a really nice job Cassie using the language and bodies of the folk tales to teach and discuss the objectives.

The italicized section was the only piece of the two-page feedback that connected to student behaviors. From our supervisory perspective, there was no indication that *any* student behaviors were inappropriate for 2nd grade, disruptive or challenging to the lesson. To the contrary the feedback overall indicated a well-attended to and student-centered lesson. At the next student teaching seminar Cassie was excited to share her experience teaching from the folktale lesson as evidenced by her statement "I have to tell you all what happened in class today!" As instructors, we were eager to hear her comments and did not expect a negative narrative. It was disappointing, then, as Cassie exclaimed, "the entire lesson was derailed by Jesse [student] who could not stop getting out of his seat and causing a distraction!" During the course of the seminar, Cassie repeated this statement over and over, continually focusing on the perceived negative behavior. Even more disturbing was Cassie's inability to see or address the many positive student contributions that we witnessed in the lesson.

[1] All PT names in this article are pseudonyms.

Another way preoccupation with student behavior is revealed was through the use of hyperbolic language. PTs routinely use overly dramatic and violent terms to discuss the actions of students, who are almost exclusively students of color. Using field notes we describe here the vignette of Lori. Lori, a white senior student teacher describes a first-grade student over and over again as "destroying the room." Instead of considering *why* the student can be frustrated, Lori throws up her hands, shakes her head and essentially gives up trying to understand the complicated factors at play. During seminars other PTs nod in agreement to statements like Lori's, and offer similar commentary. This "agreement" results in a sense of disapproval towards the first grader, as opposed to a sense of solidarity for him. As instructors when we push back on these characterizations, the PTs remain undeterred and quickly supply additional evidence that positions the students as violent, problematic, beyond help and, most importantly, beyond their responsibility. Such comments include reference to the number of times students were sent down to the office or required intervention from the school's behavior team. While we expect our PTs to wrestle with responses to student behaviors, we were disappointed and distressed that at no time did the PTs recognize or question that their responses could be racially biased. Rarely would a PT suggest that cultural dissonance or racial micro-aggressions could be an underlying factor in a student's actions. In fact, when we, as faculty, brought up the idea that PTs could be looking at the situation through a white racialized frame we often heard typical white responses such as "it is not always about race," "bringing up race is the problem" and "I am not racist."

Abdication of responsibility

A second approach for deflection was abdication of responsibility. This rationale is often invoked when PTs are pressed to explain why they did not engage in equity-minded or best practice activities. Throughout the program, including field experiences and student teaching, PTs and instructors routinely discuss the practical difficulties of teaching. Specifically, as instructors we identify and recognize the challenges of incorporating equity-focused and anti-racist teaching activities into the classroom, and we brainstorm, with PTs, ways to deal with these challenges. We acknowledge the difficulties that include: scripted curricula, mentor teacher reluctance to enact appropriate pedagogical moves and the PTs inexperience and insecurities. Figuring out how to navigate these issues, within the parameters of a clinical experience is built into our program. However, despite this intentional focus, PTs routinely abdicate responsibility with regard to curricular decisions. A common story, documented in research field notes, offers an example of this deflection at work.

> According to student teachers, the mentor teachers are 'required"' to use the 'I do, We do, You do' structure [a school practice] for lesson delivery. This has been coming up as [what I see] as an excuse to fall in line with limited and narrowed pedagogical practice. They express feeling as if they have no choice and MUST use this structure.

Student teaching is a complicated context where mentor teachers are often reluctant to let PTs stray from expected school practices. As supervisors, we understand that student teaching is not the same as PTs having their own classrooms. However, the PTs' frequent and consistent articulation of powerlessness reveals an underlying, albeit often unconscious, willingness to maintain the status quo. In our analysis, we code these instances as "Invisibility of Whiteness" since they connect with well-established patterns used by whites to abdicate responsibility

(DiAngelo, 2018). For example, during a seminar Teresa, a white PT, explains, "It just isn't possible... I think that these ideas are great, but there is no way that my mentor will let me do anything. Everything has to be straight from it [language arts scripted program adopted by the school]."

It is important to note that not every PT is unwilling to push back. PTs with a more developed racial consciousness (as evidenced by seminar contributions and written assignments in class), often our students of color, are able to find ways to work within the constraints. For example, Jackie, a biracial PT, managed to modify a small group reading lesson to include actual books despite her mentor teacher's insistence that she use pre-packaged stapled together 'readers.' Jackie's argument was that using authentic books was necessary for her students to experience real reading. Jackie took it upon herself to include the books and push back on the teachers. She says, "I went to my mentor and made a case for them [the books]. I said we really needed to do it and that I would get all the supplies." While reluctant at first, her mentor teacher eventually agreed and supported Jackie in this curricular decision.

In response to this ongoing issue above we invited the elementary school leader, Brenda to our next seminar. Brenda patiently listened to the concerns of many of the PTs who asked questions such as, "why do we have to use 'I do, We do, You do' …." Brenda was clearly shocked that the PTs and teachers said that they MUST use this pedagogical strategy. Brenda explained that at no point is that *mandatory* and teachers are always encouraged to use whatever methods they think are best for children. The PTs, are visibly surprised by Brenda's response and share their thoughts, "That is not what we were told!... My mentor said that they had no choice!". This interaction helps us to see how PT expectations, conscious and unconscious, are always at work in classrooms. As PTs work to develop the skills to teach in schools where racial and cultural mismatch are present, we are reminded of the binary, the 'all or nothing,' ways that PTs often view school experiences. While advocating in theory for best practices for schools filled with children of color, *most* PTs rarely push back during clinical time.

Clinical Experiences are Opportunities to Hide Behind and/or Challenge Whiteness

Mythology around the student teaching experience is omnipresent (Kaltsounis & Nelson, 1968; Zeichner, 2010). Over time, it has become clear to us that we – faculty, staff, mentor teachers, and PTs – unknowingly construct student teaching as one, or all, of the following: 1) one last requirement to complete to earn a teaching degree/licensure, 2) a time to be an understudy of a mentor teacher and replicate their disposition and instructional practices, 3) an opportunity for PTs to show themselves (and others) that they can 'stand on their own,' and/or 4) a final rehearsal before the time comes where PTs have their own classroom (see also Cochran-Smith, 1991; Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman, 2009; Wideen, Mayer-Smith & Moon, 1998). While each of these is true in some capacity, we have found that, if we are going to make inroads addressing whiteness – as a larger, structural, racial project – we need to re-construct the narrative around the function and end goals of student teaching. This new narrative invites PTs to consider and draw on what they have learned in their coursework and clinical experiences. It asks PTs to acknowledge these concepts and make sense of them in new contexts. It requires mentor teachers to provide space for PTs to experiment with new approaches to instruction and

relationship building, and to give consistent feedback aimed at meaning making and generating new ideas instead of instigating pedagogical tweaks.

Confronting whiteness (as a structural issue, not just as a personal identity) is at the center of our re-construction/re-conceptualization of student teaching. Understanding racism and other forms of oppression and marginalization are central to the coursework and clinical experiences leading up to student teaching, and it is a project that doesn't end with coursework. In fact, we have found that there is a huge difference between *knowing* that oppressive structures exist and *locating* oneself squarely within these systems of oppression and actively working to dismantle them. This work-in-progress has prompted us reconsider the ways in which we invite PTs to consider their practices and how these either reinforce or combat whiteness in classroom spaces and schools.

One example of this is an assignment in which we asked PTs (during their final student teaching experience) whether they discussed with their students, through curricular activities, recent demonstrations of hate across the nation. Below is an excerpt from Homework (HW) 5 on white fragility:

> In HW 2, you were asked to read the School of Education statement on racism, and to describe how and if you have discussed recent hate events (e.g., Charlottesville) in your classroom or with your mentor teacher and/or teaching partners. Almost everyone had not discussed these at all, or if they had, it was in a very minimal way. It was interesting to us that this was the case given that everyone DID say that the events were important and should be included in some way in classrooms. In the responses from HW 2, several "reasons" for not doing this were given. ***How can we make sense of, and understand why, despite saying that these racist events are important to incorporate into our curriculum, that we do not?***
>
> As teachers, part of our job is to be a reflective learner. Being a reflective learner means looking back over our actions/decisions/motivations and trying to understand why we did or did not do something and how we can improve. In this assignment, you will read an article entitled "White Fragility" (DiAngelo, 2011). We want to see if you can use it to understand why we might be reluctant to engage in conversations about racist events.

PTs were then asked to write an initial response to the article, re-read their responses to HW 2, use DiAngelo's theory to develop some ideas or reasons why they might be reluctant to discuss these topics in person and/or in class with their students, and to read and respond to a peer's paper. HW 2 is designed to gauge PTs' consciousness, readiness, and willingness to engage in critical conversations about racism and other forms of hate. Most of the PTs are aware of the frequency and significance of demonstrations of white nationalism and hate. During and following the 2016 presidential election, they seem acutely aware of the impact of racist discourses and actions on children and communities of color. Still, as documented in HW 2, some PTs express that they "had been too busy" to keep up with current events. This is not uncommon among PTs in our program and requires deliberate attention to prompt dispositional shifts among PTs, shifts that re-evaluate their understanding of systems of oppression and their role in perpetuating or disrupting oppressive structures and practices.

At the same time, HW 2 revealed that, even among those who had a solid grasp on the current events and the prevalence of racist discourses, PTs were not ready or willing to have conversations with children or colleagues about contentious events. Three ideas consistently emerged from these responses. First, PTs questioned whether discussions of racism were appropriate for young children. PT Amber conveyed this sentiment: "I feel as though this should not be brought to the attention of kindergartners unless they bring it up...While my students will be taught love, acceptance, and history of the U.S., I don't think they should know about the current events happening unless it's brought to their attention at home." While Amber clearly values love and tolerance and rejects racism, she does not see it within her responsibility to actively investigate, or engage youth in dialogue about, the origins and manifestations of racism; rather, Amber relegates to families the responsibility to process contemporary social issues that disproportionately affect communities of color and, in this way, she removes herself from responsibility. Ironically, as described by DiAngelo in the White Fragility article, Amber's response predictably falls within the coping mechanisms whites use to deflect away from conversations about race.

Second, PTs preferred to not initiate this dialogue unless children brought it up and expressed an inclination to keep their interactions with children positive and race neutral. Kiana writes,

> I would leave the floor open for open discussion and questions they may have. As I stated before, I feel it is very important to have these conversations with our students. We don't know what they are exposed to when they leave us and we have no control over it. It is our responsibility as future educators to use that time we have with them everyday to make sure we're being that positive influence in their lives and making a difference.

Kiana seems to want to protect her children from the harsh realities of racism. She, too, struggles to envision her role as the designer of age-appropriate curriculum that generates dialogue and questions about racism.

Lastly, PTs discussed hypothetically how they *would* include race conversations in their classrooms, but they just did not do it as this time. For example, Rachel writes:

> Despite feeling this way, I think that these issues should and will be discussed in my classroom. I am not afraid to discuss these issues with my students. I think that if my students want to talk about current events and events throughout history involving racism, sexism, homophobia, etc., that that line of communication will always be open. Simply because we haven't discussed these issues, doesn't mean that they aren't important.

Rachel's response reveals an acknowledgement that the content is important but, again, is another mechanism by which PTs remove themselves from racial responsibility. In our experience it is rare for a PT to become a completely different person when they transition into a permanent teaching job. The traits and tendencies observed during student teaching are strong indicators of who will and who will not take up the role of a critically conscious teacher.

These responses suggest, despite proclaimed outrage of demonstrations of hate, there exists a discomfort, or an inability to conceptualize, age-appropriate conversations with children about these realities. To us, this is whiteness in action, as there is little-to-no sense of responsibility for confronting hateful discourse and actions. While we could be content with the disgust expressed by the PTs and their vows to take racism head-on in their future classrooms, we know that the charged language used to disavow racism, and the commitments to confront it in instruction, often remain unfulfilled. Underneath the outcry there is fragility, an uneasiness with which we engage unrelenting racism. HW 5 (described above) was necessary in order to illuminate the whiteness and white fragility represented in PTs' own discourse and (in)action. It was also designed to help PTs critically detect whiteness and white fragility in the discourse of their peers. Explicit attention to developing a racial consciousness during clinical supervision is necessary, but often missing. This attention is designed to create opportunities for PTs to engage in critical reading, discussion and writing as they navigate real world classroom experiences.

Discussion and Conclusion

Expecting PTs to become anti-racist, social justice champions over the course of a typical two-year educator preparation program is a lofty goal. As white educators focused on racial consciousness, we recognize the time it takes to develop racial awareness as part of PTs' teacher identities, let alone a socially just, action-oriented approach to teaching. Supporting PTs to understand structural racism and white supremacy is a tall order and requires supervisors to be firmly anchored within an equity-oriented framework like culturally relevant pedagogy. However, despite this reality, we see our work as teacher educators as doing just that: recognizing where PTs are in their development as racially and critically conscious people, and understanding what we need to do to support them to develop in significant ways. Specifically, in our supervision work we have increased the number of readings that address white racism and structurally racist practices and we incorporate race-based discussions in every class meeting. Like others (Michael, 20014; Marx, 2006) we use actual classroom events with our PTs to center discussions on race. While it may seem as if we have a deficit-oriented view of our students, we do not see it this way.A truly honest look at where PTs are is necessary if we want to make real gains in teacher preparation. We see our students as capable of growth, and we want to expand the research base on supervision to include strategies that hold promise for supporting growth towards understanding whiteness and white fragility. Our work supports the idea that the clinical experiences and the supervision role offer opportunities to engage PTs in ways that support a critical consciousness around race and whiteness. We adamantly believe that most of our PTs are unaware of the ways they have been socialized to ignore whiteness.

We strongly support the role of clinical experiences in providing PTs with opportunities to make sense of teaching, children, and theories of learning. We argue, however, that not all clinical experiences carry with them the same – or even a net-positive – value. In fact, clinical experiences in urban classrooms and schools – where teaching and learning is conducted in a complex social system that inherently involves broader dynamics of race, class, and gender – can serve to reinforce whiteness and white supremacy, especially when PTs have not developed the ability to see white racism. While clinical experiences are readily spaces where PTs, perhaps unwittingly, hide behind whiteness, they can also afford PTs opportunities to challenge manifestations of whiteness. The latter, however, requires conscious teacher educators to help PTs see and name

whiteness and white fragility, and then imagine new, anti-racist ways of being and teaching (see also Guerra & Pazey, 2016).

Untangling and combatting systems of oppression also requires mentor teachers, school staff, and administrators to commit themselves to understanding whiteness and white fragility. Mentor teachers, with whom PTs spend the majority of their time, typically receive very little support and information around culturally relevant teaching and the program's commitment to anti-racist teaching across all subject areas. This reality underscores the need to strengthen partnerships with schools so as to increase the dialogue among stakeholders and move towards alignment of goals for outcomes of schooling (Guerra, Nelson, Jacobs & Yamamura, 2013). Of course, we recognize the sociopolitical dynamics (e.g., narrow accountability measures, school letter grades, limited resources) within which urban schools often operate.

Nonetheless, there are influential levers within our control as teacher educators that can make a significant impact on the lives of children and their families. For example, we must recognize the problematic nature of preconceived ideas about student teaching, which haven't changed in over fifty years (Kaltsounis, & Nelson, 1968). By focusing our attention on student teaching, and clinical experiences more broadly, we can shift the narrative about what it *should* involve or do. As we point out, most PTs reveal deep-rooted visions of teaching as a teacher-centered, administrator driven experience. When we pushed them to reflect on their own inclusion of race-based current event topics in student teaching classrooms, they responded in particular ways based on their unexamined whiteness and views of student teaching.

Implications

Perhaps the most significant implication of this work is the reality that, as teacher educators, particularly as clinical field supervisors, we do not disrupt well enough dominant patterns of, and rationales for, inequitable schooling practices. As with all courses in an equity-oriented teacher preparation program, critical conversations about race, whiteness, equity and social justice must occur during the clinical experience. Supervisors must develop the skills necessary to facilitate these discussions and support PTs to recognize and address racial inequities and oppressions when they occur in schools. To begin, and without judging or shaming, it is important for us to recognize that PTs require a significant level of emotional sophistication in order to 'see' how schools are racist and inequitable spaces for particular students. Following this, PTs need language to appropriately and adequately describe and understand these spaces. As described in this paper, we used our orchestrated and intentional roles as student teaching supervisors to begin understanding this complex task. It is our goal that ultimately, PTs develop the skills to teach in ways that support all students and challenge the racist narratives they are exposed to in many of their life world spaces, but we recognize that this is a difficult and lengthy process. We hope for a step beyond the ideas of the white savior (Cole, 2012) and white privilege (McIntosh, 2004). Clearly, racial consciousness requires a more complex understanding of these phenomena where things such as 'consequences' for student behaviors are interrogated through a racialized lens.

All of this takes time and helps us to understand that, when we observe PTs 'deflecting' or 'rationalizing' in deficit ways, it is both a reminder of their socialization into whiteness and also

indicative of the challenges inherent in adopting new perspectives on everyday phenomenon (e.g., (mal)treatment of children in schools; interpretation of school- or district-based initiatives and practices). Addressing this requires a re/conceptualization of supervision that includes PTs' personal growth, particularly pertaining to their ability to situate teaching practices in the larger sociopolitical context of urban youth and families. Furthermore, this means that we need to place new, more robust conceptualizations of supervision at the center of supervisors' professional development. In our context, we have instituted monthly meetings where we discuss the goals and curriculum of the program to inform new approaches to supervision.

As Emdin (2016) reminds us, "...this process [of urban teaching] can be either painful or enjoyable depending on our perception of the learner" (p. 142). While the accountability pressures and neoliberal forces have a very real, tangible effect on urban schools and classrooms, teachers must also find ways to enact creative insubordination (Gutierrez, Irving, & Gerardo, 2013), that is, developing a pedagogy that stems from what they know urban youth deserve. Clinical experiences, in tandem with skillful mediation, hold immense potential to bring new light to dark realities that are too often neglected or glossed over in superficial ways.

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